

## strengthening families in states

A statewide Strengthening Families™ initiative is a cross-systems approach to preventing abuse and neglect and promoting optimal development for all children, organized around building the five, research-based Protective Factors in families. While approaches differ from state to state, in each case there is a commitment to increasing the reach of Strengthening Families so that more professionals can frame their work with families around the Protective Factors.

Over half of all states are using the Strengthening Families approach. This allows them to:

- Support more early care and education programs in using the Protective Factors framework and implementing program strategies that build Protective Factors
- Infuse meaningful parent leadership and involvement at all levels of policy and practice
- Build stronger, mutually-beneficial relationships between the early childhood and child welfare sectors
- Bring together major agencies, organizations, and programs working with young children and their families to increase collaboration and communication
- Improve quality in early care and education programs
- Change child welfare practice to address the developmental needs of the youngest children coming into contact with the system

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

The heart of a state Strengthening Families Initiative is a multidisciplinary leadership team, including stakeholders from state early childhood and child welfare agencies, representatives from major child- and family-serving organizations, and at least one parent leader. Many state leadership teams are also the planning groups for other statewide initiatives, such as Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems. The team, convened by a lead organization or agency, concentrates its efforts on making concrete changes to policies and systems to infuse the Strengthening Families approach and Protective Factors framework into work with children and families that is already taking place.

Each state Strengthening Families initiative looks different because the policy climate in each state is different. Leadership teams look for opportunities and develop strategies according to what is doable in the state. For profiles of state initiatives and their work, visit [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).

## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families approach. Research indicates that when these factors are present and robust in a family, the likelihood of abuse and neglect diminish. The Protective Factors are:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Supports in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Professionals in early childhood, family support, child welfare, and a variety of other sectors can make small but significant changes in their day to day work to build these Protective Factors in families.

# strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

The Strengthening Families National Network connects over half of all states in a learning community dedicated to developing and implementing strategies to support Strengthening Families around the country.

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES NATIONAL NETWORK

Launched in 2008, the Strengthening Families National Network gives members a forum for sharing knowledge and tools, learning together within and across states, and helping each other transform systems that support children and families. Membership in the network is free, renewable annually, and open to all states, territories, and tribes implementing Strengthening Families.

There are two levels of membership in the Strengthening Families National Network:

1. **Partners** have implemented deep, broad-based Strengthening Families approaches in multiple systems and take a leadership role in the Network.
2. **Affiliates** are strongly committed to Strengthening Families and are carrying out strategies that could lead to becoming a Partner.

Membership in the Strengthening Families National Network includes several benefits:<sup>1</sup>

- Access to an online community of peers dedicated to strengthening families. Network members exchange tools and materials with others nationwide and access multiple types peer-to-peer technical assistance
- Access to aggregated data from your state collected by programs using online Strengthening Families tools, including the Strengthening Families Self Assessment
- Opportunities to pilot new tools or partner with CSSP and other national organizations to develop new strategies for Strengthening Families implementation
- Technical assistance calls with Network members and staff of the national initiative around statewide implementation of Strengthening Families and a variety of other topical areas, such as engaging corporate partners

## LEVERS FOR CHANGE

State in the Strengthening Families National Network are framing their Strengthening Families work in certain areas, called the “Levers for Change.”

- Parent Partnerships: building meaningful collaborations with parents at all levels
- Professional Development: training and supporting professionals in building Protective Factors with Families
- Infrastructure Changes: changing licensing standards, contracts, MOUs,
- Early Childhood-Child Welfare Linkages: strengthening communication and collaboration between these sectors
- Early Childhood Systems Integration: building coordination among systems that help young children and their families

1. Although membership is at the state level, each person on a leadership team has access to the benefits of the